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ABSTRACT

To counteract the legacy of 80 years of colonial rule in North Viet Nam, President Ho Chi Minh outlined government objectives in the Declaration of Independence in 1945. Major objectives included combatting ignorance and illiteracy. To work toward these objectives, the government established a Department of Popular Education and encouraged volunteers to teach literacy courses in private homes, market places, and other available locales. Although literacy progress was slowed by war until 1955, a fresh post-war literacy drive succeeded in eliminating most illiteracy by 1958. Key success factors included commitment by the Communist Party and the government, a high degree of acceptance by people of all ages, and enthusiasm among volunteers. In addition to literacy courses, basic education programs (complementary education) were offered to youth, white collar workers, laborers, and adults. Course topics included modern technology, working with modern equipment, labor productivity, human development, and national history. Schools are now organized at workplaces and at separate institutions where students board and are paid wages. Objectives for complementary education in the near future include wiping out illiteracy in remote mountain regions, offering basic education to all workers, raising cultural standards, and encouraging continuing education for dropouts. (Author/DB)

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The struggle against illiteracy in Asia and Oceania 1

The elimination of illiteracy and the use of Complementary Education in the Socialist Republic of VIET NAM

Prepared by the
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Ministry of Education
Hanoi

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THE ELIMINATION OF ILLITERACY AND THE USE OF COMPLEMENTARY EDUCATION IN THE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM

Illiteracy in Viet Nam prior to the August Revolution of 1945 and the Combat against illiteracy since the August Revolution

During the 80 long years of old colonialism up to the successful August Revolution of 1945, Vietnamese education was far from developed. In the populous plains, there were only one incomplete primary school and a few elementary classes for a cluster of from five-to-seven villages; and only one full primary school for a whole district, with an enrolment of about 50 pupils, most of them coming from wealthy families. In the remote mountain regions, the number of schools was even less.

For higher levels, there were only a dozen secondary and three high schools, with a limited enrolment of children from the wealthy families, the mandarins and the high-ranking functionaries.

This situation of limited education was responsible for widespread illiteracy, running up to 95 per cent, among the then population of 20 million people. The bulk of the peasantry and the working class did not know how to read and write. The number of literates in the hamlets could be counted on the fingers of one hand; in many cases one could hardly find any literate around to have him read or write a letter.

On 19 August 1945, the Revolution broke out under the leadership of the Communist Party and President Ho Chi Minh. On 2 September 1945; the Revolution triumphed across the country and President Ho Chi Minh read the Declaration of Independence on behalf of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. Presently, President Ho Chi Minh laid down three major guiding lines: combat famine, combat ignorance and combat foreign aggression. He made a call for the entire people to fight ignorance and illiteracy, and on

8 September 1945, he signed a decree to establish the Department for Popular Education with the task of eradicating illiteracy throughout the country.

A popular education movement for teaching and learning surged up powerfully. Literacy courses were to be seen everywhere. Children, grown-ups and elderly people went to class with zeal. The instructors were the small number of young literates from villages and hamlets and teachers and pupils from general-education schools. They volunteered to take up teaching without remuneration. Classrooms were mobile: in pagodas, private homes, market-places, riversides. Numerous families put into practice what President Ho Chi Minh had taught: brothers teaching sisters, husbands teaching wives, grandchildren teaching grandparents to read and write. Many learned their lessons while working, going to market, pulling boats, fishing... They used sticks or pieces of brick to practise writing on leaves or house-floors.

A new method of teaching the alphabet was pioneered and practised. It took only a couple of months to learn to read and write instead of the former requirement of five or six months.

The movement kept surging on and yielded tremendous results after just one year: 2.5 million people became literate.

By the close of 1946, the old colonialists staged a come back throughout the land. The war of resistance was ranging bitterly and lasted nine years. Despite many difficulties, the anti-illiteracy campaign was kept up under the slogans: "To study is to fight", "To study is to love the fatherland". It drew a great number of people who fought and worked in the daytime but learned to read and write late into the night in the flickering light of oil lamps.

The war of resistance came to a successful end with the victory of the Dien Bien Phu Campaign, and the Geneva Agreements were signed. The northern half of Viet Nam was completely liberated. The achievements recorded by the anti-illiteracy campaign were great: over ten million people had become literate during the nine years of resistance.

However, in the liberated North then, over 3 million people between the ages of 12 and 50 were still illiterate. So a fresh drive was launched and by 1958, the North

had fundamentally eliminated illiteracy, save in a few far-off regions in the mountains.

In the southern half of the country, the working people in many localities remained illiterate for twenty years. In April 1975, at the time of the total liberation of the South, statistics showed that about four million people were illiterate in the South, among whom the adult illiterates constituted nearly one million. So an anti-illiteracy campaign was launched from 1975 with an energetic zeal. Since December 1977, illiteracy has been virtually abolished among the working people below 50 years of age for men and below 45 years of age for women (below 40 years of age for both men and women in the mountain regions) in almost all provinces in the South. The rate of literacy in the metropolitan areas was very high, 95 per cent on an average. In March 1978, a grand festival was held in Ho Chi Minh City to hail the elimination of illiteracy in the southern provinces, and throughout the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. In the festival, numerous organizations and individuals with prominent records spoke of their experiences and achievements. Prizes were also awarded by the Government.

Key factors for the successful elimination of illiteracy

The following are the key factors for the successful eradication of illiteracy in Viet Nam:

1. The Communist Party and Government of Viet Nam have paid great attention and showed great determination to do away with illiteracy within a short time with a view of enlightening the working people, thus creating favourable conditions for all citizens to grasp and realize the Party and Government's lines and policies. At all levels from the centre downward the provinces, the districts and the villages, capable cadres have been assigned to take charge of the job.

2. The Vietnamese people have a great love for knowledge, this is indeed one of the traditional characteristics of the nation. On top of all, their ardent partriotism and their profound confidence in the revolution and venerated President Ho Chi Minh have kept their fire for study burning all the time. Quite a large number of elderly people aged between 60-70 worked very hard in studying and setting

fine examples for their grandchildren. The anti-illiteracy campaign was launched as a mass movement, with continual and widespread activities. Therefore very many difficulties were overcome by the people themselves.

3. A major part in the success of the anti-illiteracy campaign was played by the large contingent of popular-education cadres, who were energetic, voluntary and selfless. They were the very creators of the creative and multi-dimensional methods of teaching that required little time but gave more heart to the learners. A few among them bravely laid down their lives while doing their work in the war of resistance, and some of them were awarded the title of heroes and emulation-fighters by the Government.

Nevertheless, the anti-illiteracy movement has some shortcomings that have, to some extent, limited the impacts of the movement. The anti-illiteracy drive among the ethnic minorities in the remote mountain regions or among the fishermen in the coastal areas has to face many difficulties in language, circumstances, supply of teachers and the like. That is the reason why tens of thousands of people in these areas have not learned to read and write so far. Efforts are being made to solve the problems.

Relapsing into illiteracy represents another problem which needs attention. Once the anti-illiteracy drive has been successful, efforts must be made to popularize the reading of books and papers. Experience shows that the best way is to organize supplementary-education courses to follow-up the literacy programme. Thus, for the time being, the metropolitan areas are providing the first-level compulsory education.

First-level compulsory education for the children of school age is closely associated with the anti-illiteracy programme for the adults. Since this was not fully implemented during the years of the war, there now remains a large number of illiterate boys and girls in addition to the adult illiterates. Experience shows that only by closely linking the anti-illiteracy movement with first-level compulsory education of the children, illiteracy can be eradicated effectively.

Today, although the anti-illiteracy movement has been implemented throughout the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, efforts are being made to intensify it among those who have had no opportunities to learn before, among the ethnic

minorities in the faraway mountain regions and among the people beyond the fixed age for literacy but still able to take up the lessons.

The movement for complementary education of the adults

The work of anti-illiteracy, although very important, is merely the initial step in the whole process of raising the cultural standards of the entire working people. The cause of socialist revolution and construction calls for an ever-increasing cultural standard among the working people. For long-term benefits, all people should receive universal second-level general education so as to perform the productive works with modern equipment and for achieving higher labour productivity. What is more, high cultural, scientific and technological standards are required for a new type of working people and for the modern-minded man.

As for the cadres working in the governmental offices who came mostly from the formerly oppressed, exploited and illiterate sections of the population, the raising of their cultural standards is an even more urgent task. That is why, in his lifetime, President Ho Chi Minh time-and-again recommended that all cadres and working people should attend complementary-education courses.

In the northern provinces since 1960 and in the southern provinces since the total liberation, great attention by the state has been paid to the work of complementary education.

The three categories of recipients of complementary education are: cadres, youths and the working people. Priorities are given to the cadres and youths who showed merits in production and fighting.

The goal is to provide all village cadres with second-level of general education and some core village cadres with third-level of general education. District and provincial cadres should be provided with third-level general education and some of them with university-level education in their special fields.

The prominent young people who are regarded as a reservist force for the Party and Government offices, and the future successors of the revolution, should make efforts to attain third-level general education to continue their

studies in the universities. The majority of young people should now aim for second-level general education, and then in the long run, third-level general education.

As for the common masses of the working people, efforts should be made to provide universal first-level general education with special emphasis on productive skills and the new way of life.

The basic contents of the complementary education programme are the same as those of the first, second and third-levels of the general education in the schools, but they are shortened and made concise. Combination of theory with practices, management of production and practical life experiences are emphasized in the complementary education programmes.

In the northern provinces, during the long years of resistance to the air-naval war of destruction, the movement for complementary education kept operating and developed vigorously in spite of great difficulties. During the war under the round-the-clock bombings in provinces such as Nghe Tinh, Quang Binh and Vinh Linh, the people and cadres dug deep bomb-proof shelters as underground classrooms.

At present, over 1,400,000 adults are attending various types of complementary-education schools in the country, among whom nearly 300,000 are attending regular schools and on-the-job classes which offer a relatively stable quality of education.

Thanks to the continual movement for complementary education, at present, tens of thousands of village, district and provincial cadres in the northern provinces have achieved the necessary cultural standards. Over the past twenty years, the complementary-education regular schools have given education to nearly 20,000 cadres, who are now working in all services of the State apparatus as middle and high-ranking scientific workers. The general cultural standards of the working people, especially of those living in the plains, have been raised markedly. In the North, over 1,500 villages have already achieved universal first-level general education of the people.

The movement for complementary education in the South, though in its initial stage of development, is now enrolling over 700,000 people who have just attained literacy to continue their learning in the second and third forms of complementary education.

In the nation-wide movement for complementary education, some advanced units with prominent records of achievements and experiences have been awarded by the Ministry of Education. Some complementary-education cadres with merits have been awarded the title of heroes and emulation-fighters, and they were conferred orders and diplomas of honour.

Some experiences in complementary-education work

Although complementary education (including anti-illiteracy work) has recorded achievements, it has still certain shortcomings. The movement has been sometimes unstable and unsteady, the contents of the programmes are not quite suited to the needs of the learners, some cadres and young people have not been active enough to overcome difficulties in their studies, and a few Party committees and offices concerned have not paid due attention to the works.

The following are a few lessons of experience drawn from the movement:

1. Close attention by the leaderships of various State apparatus to the complementary education is of great necessity. They are accountable for the removal of difficulties about school premises, and policies regarding the teachers and the learners, hence for the success of the movement. One of the principles in the movement is "Those who manage production are responsible for the work of complementary education in their own units", and since the learners are the very cadres and workers in their units of production, attention paid by the leaderships of all levels, all branches and production units to the principle is a 'must.'

2. The movement for anti-illiteracy and complementary education assumes a broad mass character. However, in the anti-illiteracy movement in Viet Nam, those people whose mother tongue is transcribed in latinized scripts can learn to read and write fluently in a relatively short time (usually in a couple of months). The contents of programmes and the methods present no serious problems for them. What is more important for the literacy work is, how to mobilize the masses and promote the movement with guidance and slogans which fit for each stage to draw both the instructors and the learners, with timely citations and rewards to

maintain and promote the initiatives in organizing classes suitable to the living conditions of the learners. But, for the work of complementary education, due to the scientific and educational characters of the programme, more scientific and educational know-how is required for the development of the contents of programmes and the methods suited to the various levels of the complementary education. Therefore, in the movement for complementary education, mobilization and appeals are not enough but concrete efforts should be made towards the organization of schools and classes, developing proper programmes and textbooks, building minimum necessary premises and appointing a qualified teaching staff. As far as the construction of physical facilities are concerned, the people should play the key role, but investment by the State is also necessary. The State investment is higher for a regular school for prominent cadres and young workers, than for the general-education school of the same level. The expenditure however, will bring about good results, such as training and fostering of a large army of qualified cadres greatly loyal to the regime for the success of the cause of the revolution.

3. The complementary-education work should draw numerous qualified people to do the teaching work. The teaching staff may be drawn from teachers of general-education schools, colleges and universities and scientific and technological cadres. But it is very necessary to have a group of teachers-in-charge on the government payrolls, who are responsible for the organization of the schools and the classes, for the application and observance of rules and regulations, for the implementation of the programmes for the division of tasks, and for assisting the other teachers. Some of the rural localities appoint young people with third-level of general education who are paid by the co-operatives for teaching the subjects of natural sciences. As for regular schools for outstanding cadres and young workers, the Government should assign experienced teachers. In order to improve the work of complementary education, there may be three types of teaching staff:

a) Teachers-in-charge on the Government payrolls, as the core;

b) Teachers for subjects of natural sciences paid by the co-operatives;

c) Non-professional teachers consisting of those

who are qualified and who have certain cultural standards.

The teachers-in-charge are graduates from Teachers' Training Secondary and High Schools, Colleges and Universities. They are trained and geared to teaching in general-education schools, and they are not accustomed to the teaching methods in the complementary education. Therefore they feel more often than not confused in mobilizing the masses and organizing a complementary-education school or class. That is the reason why every year each provincial bureau for education should organize courses for training the teachers in complementary education under the guidance of the Ministry of Education.

The teachers paid by the co-operatives were usually trained in the Complementary-Education Teachers' Schools of central and provincial levels. However, those schools have now closed, and so crash courses for boys and girls with third-level general education are opened by the provinces to train them as teachers of first and second-levels of complementary education.

For non-professional teachers, numerous localities have organized orientation courses on programmes and methods of teaching for the adults. During the courses, the lectures are sometimes given by the teachers-in-charge who previously attended similar courses.

To encourage the complementary-education teachers in their work, the Government has decreed some policies regarding their bonus, payraise, teaching regulations and medical benefits.

4. The complementary-education recipients are, in general, grown-up working men with psychological and physiological characteristics and living conditions far more different from that of pupils in general-education. On the other hand, their time for study is limited. Therefore, there should be an institute to study problems of contents and methods of teaching adults in complementary education.

At present, apart from the Department for Complementary Education, the Ministry of Education has established a Commission for Research in Complementary Education to do research into: complementary-education reforms, the policies for the development of complementary education, the psychology and physiology of the grown-ups for application in the works, various types of programmes and contents and

methods of teaching and learning for each category of learners. This Commission is under the direct leadership of the Minister.

The present programmes and contents of complementary education were developed when the movement was first initiated. At that time the programmes and the textbooks were compiled under the principles of simplicity, practicality and a close relationship between theory and technical practice. It was attempted to make the complementary education programme suited to the learners' standards and requirements of each economic zone or ethnic area (Directive 97 of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Viet Nam Communist Party). The following types of programmes and textbooks are now available:

a) textbooks for the anti-illiteracy programme;

b) textbooks in the official language for the ethnic minorities;

c) textbooks for first-level complementary education covering 650 periods in four school-years;

d) textbooks for second-level complementary education, covering 1,000 periods in four school-years;

e) textbooks for third-level complementary education (for young people), covering 1,000 periods in four school-years;

f) textbooks for third-level complementary education (for middle-aged people) covering 600 periods in three school-years.

The regular schools for prominent young workers develop a programme of their own which is similar to that of the third-level of general education and uses the most of the same textbooks. The graduates of such a complementary education system are eligible to take the entrance examinations of colleges and universities. However, one of the biggest weaknesses of the current complementary-education programme and textbooks lies in the fact that they mainly satisfy the requirements of fundamental sciences, but the requirement of combining theory and technical practice, production and social life are not met so far. That is one of the main reasons why efforts should be made to improve the current complementary-education programmes and textbooks.

5. Since the complementary-education learners work in various fields and professions, there should be forms of study and types of schools suitable to their working and living conditions.

In Viet Nam at present, there are two types of complementary-education schools as mentioned earlier. They are:

- Schools organized on the job: consisting of on-the-job schools and enterprises operating for two evenings a week; complementary-education schools of the districts, provinces and towns operating for four to six evenings a week; village complementary-education schools for village cadres operating for four to six evenings a week and schools for young people operating for four to six evenings a week. In such schools, study is combined with productive labour.

- Regular schools enrol learners as boarders who are completely separate from production or their work at the offices or enterprises. There are such complementary-education schools for district and provincial levels cadres, for prominent young people in the provinces, and for ethnic boys and girls in a few mountain districts and provinces. Some of these schools adopt the study-and-work system. They are all financed by the State. The learners who are recipients as cadres are allowed to have full wages and if there are other young people they are granted scholarships.

Both types of schools are, in different ways, doing their utmost to practise the principle of education laid down by the Fourth National Congress of the Viet Nam Communist Party i.e. "Combining theory with practice, education with productive labour, school activities with social life". The principles are applied in a proper manner among the learners.

Over the past decades, under the clear sighted leadership of the Party and Government, the work of anti-illiteracy and complementary education has been viewed as part and parcel of the cultural and ideological revolution. Even at present, the complementary education of prominent cadres and young people is regarded as a very important and urgent educational task.

The work of anti-illiteracy and complementary education has, despite enormous difficulties during the wars, yielded fine results such as the elimination of illiteracy which has contributed in the training of an army of young

cadres for the revolution, and it has helped in raising the cultural standards of tens of thousands of management cadres of all levels and hence upgraded the cultural standards of the entire people.

In years to come, more efforts will be made to rectify the shortcomings in the complementary education for fulfilling the following major tasks:

a) Carrying out total elimination of illiteracy among those who have had no opportunities to learn before, and among the ethnic minorities in the remote mountain regions;

b) Application of universal first-level general education for all working people throughout the country;

c) Further raising the cultural standards of prominent cadres and young people according to the criteria set by the central government;

d) Making efforts to give complementary education to those young people who were the dropouts of the secondary schools, with a view to applying universal second-level general education to all young people in the country;

A present, the authorities responsible for the complementary education in Viet Nam are studying various measures for the improvement of the organization, programmes and teaching and learning methods in an attempt to accomplish the major reforms in the complementary education.